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Christian Missions and American Nationalism

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We have all heard the story of the humble Japanese shop-keeper in the Philippines who, when the invasion came, turned out to be a Japanese officer who took part in the invasion. That story has been told many times about many localities. Here is a parallel to it. The story appeared in the New York paper, PM under date of April 11, 1943. The title is "The Missionaries Have Also Gone to War." I quote: "A Japanese was captured in the fighting in southeastern Asia. He was very frightened and very angry and wouldn't talk. A missionary who is now an officer in the marine intelligence was sent for. He engaged this prisoner in two hours of small talk about things Japanese and then he got the Japanese to show his muscles after flattering him a little and then offered him cigarettes and then the Japanese gave him information of military value which he had refused to give before that time." This writer says: "The extra value missionaries bring to the job when they serve with the armed forces as interpreters is well illustrated by that story. The psychological trick would work in any language, of course. But it took a real knowledge of Japanese etiquette and temperament to put it over. Such knowledge is gained only by having lived with Japanese as the missionaries have."

A humble Japanese shop-keeper became an officer in the Japanese army. A humble American missionary became an officer in the American army. Ask yourself how at the end of the war we are going to explain the difference between those two men to a Burmese or a Filipino or to some other Asiatics who are fed up with all foreigners and want to live their own lives. This is one of the problems with which nationalism confronts the Christian mission. It is the problem of a conflict of loyalties. How was the missionary different from the Japanese? Both were in the grip of a hidden loyalty which at the time of crisis became their driving force.

What is this thing that will make a Christian missionary act like a Japanese fifth columnist? (Only a few missionaries act as this one did, but this one man illustrates our problem.) It is this thing called nationalism. In the atmosphere provided by nationalism we live like fish live in water. It is so much all around us and part of us that we don't recognize it until a

startling thing of this kind occurs. What is nationalism? In what ways does American nationalism stand in the way of the world Christian mission? How can it be changed to help instead of hinder the Christian world mission?

Nationalism is the modern form of the Old Testament idea that the Hebrews were the "chosen people"—a people chosen by God to fulfill a unique and beneficent mission in history. In its modern form it goes back to the Renaissance which reasserted the dignity and worth of man. It found explosive expression in the French revolution. The rise of modern nationalism has coincided with the beginning of the industrial revolution in some countries. It could not exist without universal education or universal conscription. It is linked to the rise of democracy. Universal conscription started in France at the time when modern democracy got its birth. The growth of nationalism has been paralleled by the trebling of the population of the world, and the development of a vast flow of goods, people, and ideas all over the planet.

During this century and a half some regions have developed industrially out of all proportion with other regions. Some people have benefited and other people have been greatly deprived. Some ideas which have gained wide currency have been true and others have been false. A false idea is that of racial superiority. Gobineau, a French romanticist, ninety years ago wrote "The Inequality of Nations." It was an attempt to attribute to racial admixture the decline of nations and empires. This thesis, spread on the wings of the industrial revolution, has produced endless woe. So, while the new age contains the possibility of great good, it produces also great suffering. Differences have been exaggerated. Great chasms have been opened between men whose happiness was only possible through cooperation. That which might have been good often becomes evil.

For example, turn back to the great Hebrew idea that God chose a people to fulfill a mission which would cause all men to call them blessed. That is a true and holy conception. But it was perverted into the idea that God has chosen one nation to dominate other nations. That is nationalism. So a good idea can easily be twisted into a perverted and evil notion. The good idea that man was endowed with dignity and worth by his creator became twisted into the nationalist idea that man could achieve dignity by ruthless self-assertion without giving either gratitude to God or compassion to man. The good idea of man's equality under God was wrongly delimited by national

boundary lines. This sanctified the notion that the state might enforce inequality on all outside its arbitrarily drawn borders. So British democracy, generous, noble and inspiring as it is, has never been able to bring democracy to India by its rule of force. The idea of equality under God was further limited by seizing upon the differences in color of men's skins as a proof that men are equal only within racial divisions. This assumed that a "white" color of skin carries with it intellectual, moral and spiritual superiority. The Japanese are now trying the shoe on the other foot. They seek to prove that a yellow skin automatically bestows superior mental and spiritual powers. Both are wrong.

Under nationalism the good idea of liberty is used to enhance the sovereignty of collective man, not only over his fellows but over God, to whom he no longer acknowledges a responsibility, whose law is displaced by the decree of parliaments and congresses, whose judgment no man fears and whose Fatherly care none seeks half as much as he desires the security given by the state. Having no roots in the eternal, men rest ultimate authority in their states. Since these, in turn, are principally agencies for the attempted satisfaction of insatiable material wants, the fearful and unsatisfied people undergo the fate of all those "whose god is in their bellies." Nation wars against nation and miseries multiply. Today men despair that they shall ever plant a crop, being sure they will reap the harvest; or that they shall ever build a house in the certainty that they and their chldiren may dwell therein. This is true of Germany or Japan. It is also true of Britain and the United States. It is to this fate that materialism, resting upon the deification of the state in the false religion of nationalism, has brought humanity.

Nationalism is the good love of men for the land of their birth. It is also the evil dominance of men who deride others as inferior simply because they were not born in the same country. Nationalism is the good faith of men who affirm their own integrity. At the same time it is the evil pride of men who worship the nation as the Godlike extension of their own egos. Nationalism is the good generosity of men who work together for the common welfare. Simultaneously it is the evil tribalism of men who shut all people of other nations out of the bounty which their nation enjoys. Nationalism is the good reverence for life within the state, and the reverence for life which the great missionary, Albert Schweitzer, teaches is basic to all faith. It tries to accelerate the birth rate and seeks to preserve each

little child of its own people. But it is also the evil spirit of death which kills without compunction those whom the state calls enemy. Nationalism is love for one's own but it is also hate for those who are thought to be not one's own. Nationalism is equality, love, fraternity, liberty, unity, cooperation and many other good things. But nationalism is also antipathy, egotism, lies, hate, prejudice, contention, anarchy and blasphemous pride before God.

Perhaps it is a necessary stage in the evolution of society. But it must be immediately abandoned once it has been achieved. Today nationalism may well be a virtue in India and in China but it is certainly a vice in England and Japan. It is an ideal to be striven for in Africa, but a sin to be overcome in America. The balance between its good and evil is a narrow line. Nationalism has raised up the greatest nations of history only to destroy them in the most colossal and bloody wars of all times. Dr. Quincy Wright's great new study of "War" indicates that children born today have a greater chance of dying as a direct or indirect result of war than did any children ever before born in the history of the world. This study provides clear warning that we shall either go beyond nationalism or be destroyed by it. We shall either achieve world unity or go down in chaos, famine and war.

Dr. Chirgwin of the London Missionary Society in his book, "Under Fire," says that the greatest problem confronted by Christian missions is the world struggle between Christianity and nationalism. He describes it as in progress in all the countries of the world, including America. A. A. Berle, of the Department of State, maintains that the only revolution which has recurred again and again is the Christian revolution. This would indicate that the only faith that has an adequite base for a world society is not nationalism but the Christian faith. I have sat at the feet of Gandhi in India and have talked with revolutionists in Russia. I am convinced that Christianity is the only religious faith that has any chance at all of being a world faith. In spite of all the evidence to the contrary, man is a child of God. It is the world mission of Christianity to unite the children of God in the family of God.

Through Jesus Christ we have adequate grounds for the faith that God is love and that he is the Father of all men; that he has created men to live together in peace and equality in one human family. Through Christ we believe that sinning men can find forgiveness and can be reconciled to God and to each other. Through Christ we believe that suffering even unto

death can be made redemptive if it is voluntarily assumed as a witness to the nature of the goodness and the power of God. Because of Christ's victory on the cross we can not refrain from using every means at our command to teach all men everywhere the things that belong to their peace and to our own peace in the Kingdom of God. Evil can be overcome by good. God lives and rules. To preach this is the Christian mission which will never end. It is the Church's mission to this new age.

This new age is not the Utopia that some people think will emerge full-formed at the end of the present war. Instead it is the extension of that which began when God gave men the machines of the industrial revolution. For the first time He made it possible to lift the yoke of want from man's shoulders. For the first time the world became one, united by a network of instant communications and bound together so closely that no place on earth is more than sixty hours from any other. This is the new age.

In this new age, nationalism is not only the greatest rival of Christianity as a world religion, but it is the final foe of progress toward world community. Yet nationalism is all around us and is the only real religion of most of our acquaintances.

The American nationalism is an obstacle to the Christian mission at the following points:

1. The American nationalism has interacted with German and Italian nationalism to bring war between Christian nations. To non-Christian people this is held up as the proof that Christianity is eye-wash, that the people who hold it don't believe it. This war proves to them that Christianity is incapable of so organizing the people within the lands who accept it that they can be prevented from destroying one another. War itself is an affront to and a denial of the Christian faith. When you try to talk to an intelligent Chinese pagan or an astute Russian pagan you will find that that is true. The fact that our two Christian nations are fighting is to be laid at the doors of American nationalism and German nationalism.

2. American nationalism has interacted with Japanese nationalism to produce a war between the greatest Christian nation and the most powerful non-Christian nation. This has helped to blast and to destroy a large share of the physical plant of Christian missions in East Asia—the hospitals, schools, and churches built up by a century of Christian work. It has helped to destroy the leaders, many of whom have been killed, and to scatter the Christian community in that part of the world. It has broken many of the ties that have bound together the

younger churches of the west and the older churches of the east. This interaction of war has disrupted peaceful living through eastern Asia, has set back progress fifty years, has brought famine and pestilence. As the war stands at this moment it has cut Asia off from the rest of the world, has increased tyranny and has brought the gospel into disrepute from Kiska to Raboul, from the Solomons to the Himalayas.

3. American nationalism has passed exclusion acts aimed to prevent all Asiatic people from entering this country. Its refusal to place all immigration on a non-discriminatory quota basis and this injustice has made the world mission of Christianity more difficult. Orientals rightly ask why they should accept missionaries in their crowded lands when they cannot send their own people to the rich and roomy countries from which the missionaries came. The exclusion policy is taken as a denial to brotherhood and of the obligation of the rich to share their bounties with those who do not have so much. Our responsibility for this injustice is not reduced by the fact that it has been imposed on our country by only a small section of our population.

4. American nationalism also has become entangled with unscientific and un-Christian racism in such an evil way as seriously to hinder the preaching of the Gospel all over the world. The wholly mistaken and calamitous action by which all Japanese-Americans were removed from their homes to tar-paper barracks in relocation centers, will plague the Christian mission all over the world for a long time to come. It is not only a black blot on the democratic way of life, or domestic justice. It is far more than a question of civil liberties. It is a stain on the Christianity of any people who would allow it to happen. Wherever missionaries go this will be an obstacle in the way of the acceptance of their message. Its effect will be heightened by our habitual persecution of Negroes, Mexicans and other racial minorities.

5. American nationalism seeks to protect what is called, "The American Way of Life" by a policy of selfish high tariffs. For us to pyramid economic advantage for a few at the expense of the rest of the world raises serious barriers to world economic collaboration. To lower and to stabilize tariffs would be as important a contribution to world peace and order as to join a world political organization.

6. American nationalism refuses to take others into account but adopts economic policies which may ruinously affect other nations. An example is the calamitous effect of our government's silver purchase policy on China. It has ruined the cur-

rency system of China, which was based on silver, and helped to produce a wild inflation there. A similar thing happened when Czechoslavakia was fighting for her life. An action of the American Congress struck a villanous blow at Czechoslavakia's economy in the last moments of that state's existence. Our relations with Canada and Mexico are full of such disastrous deeds. That they are often done in ignorance is no excuse.

7. American nationalism's greatest sin against Christian world brotherhood has been its refusal to accept the position of responsibility in a world government like the League of Nations or in a planetary judicial system like the world court. The fact that we have joined the International Labor Organization and participated in other international enterprises may be a sign that repentance in this direction is on the way.

How can American nationalism be changed to a pro-humanity policy which will aid the Christian mission?

1. American Christians will have to recognize that nationalism is the only religion known to millions of our countrymen, including many in the churches. We shall therefore be compelled to redirect our evangelism. People whose God is the state must be converted to a belief in the God of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. They must be converted from faith in Caesar to faith in the God of love. The disillusionment that is certain to come at the end of the war should offer an opportunity for large-scale evangelism aimed at this conversion. Much of the work that must be done must be corporate evangelism. We have known something about the winning of souls individually. We have something to learn about the winning of people by families. We have still more to learn about the evangelism of people in their group relations, bringing the whole man in all of his relations to Christ. This is a major problem in such states as Japan, Russia and Germany. It is not less a problem in America where nationalism entrenches itself behind ex-soldier organizations, behind the conservative descendants of the revolutionary fathers and in many civic groups. A beginning might be made now but greater strides will be possible at the end of this war.

What may we expect then? There are those who expect a veritable Utopia to dawn. They are headed for profound disillusionment. When the casualties are known, when the failure of the war to cure our deepest sickness, which is the sickness of the soul, is clear; when the truth about the politics, the graft and corruption which are always associated with war are known; when the men who have gone to prison for conscience sake have had the opportunities to tell their stories without fear of being

sent back to prison again; when the censorship is lifted from India and China and we have a chance to learn what they know about this war; when the people now starving in Europe begin to talk about our blockade; when we harvest the full crop of moral delinquency and chicanery which war has sowed—then disillusionment will be a tame word to describe the feelings of a people who have for the second time in a generation given of the fruit of their bodies for the sin of their souls.

Now disillusionment can be a very terrible thing. It can be the hotbed in which fascism springs up overnight. It can grease the ways down which we slide into totalitarianism. But disillusionment may, if there is a people prepared to preach the ultimate truth of the family of God, be the open door to penitence and to a new life within the world community. We must pray and work for that at the end of the war—for the conversion of millions of disillusioned people from the religion of nationalism to the worship of the one true God.

2. We can also work to change the evil side of American nationalism by trying to do all we can to get the United States to take its share of the responsibility in a world organization. It should be, not a League of Nations, but a unified world society of free people. The basic document should be, not a covenant between sovereign states, but a bill of human rights which applies to every man, woman, and child in the world. This could be a Magna Charta of humanity. Every person in the world should be guaranteed, not because some association of states says so but because God has made us that way, respect for his dignity as a human personality, freedom of his person from arbitrary arrest and seizure, freedom of speech, assembly, press and organization, freedom from famine, freedom from conscription, and freedom of faith or freedom not to have a faith. Such a basic bill of human rights would apply as much to the Indians, the Chinese, the Russians, the Germans, the Japanese or the British as to us. It should be the basis on which a world government, possessing executive, legislative and judicial powers, would work.

This government should maintain a police force whose first duty should be to supervise the disarmament of all nations, including our own. By a police force I mean a police force, not an army. Very reluctantly I have come to believe that we should join such a world society even though we have to work toward it gradually. Considering the opposition of Mr. Churchill to India's freedom and the attitude of Russia toward the Baltic states, it is evident that we shall have to go into a world organization which will seem to be maintaining much that is

evil in the status quo. Four hundred million people are trying to rebel against that status quo in India. Shall we go into a society of nations which may for the time seem to deprive them of their freedom? If we have to choose between that and isolationism, I say, "Yes," providing its basic charter is such a bill of human rights and the ultimate aim is a world society of free men.

3. American nationalism can also be, partially changed by a continuance of the lease-lend principle after the war. Lease-lend has worked for destruction in war. In peace it should be widened to include food, medicine and machinery for peacful reconstruction of Europe and Asia, including Germany and Japan. If this requires the extension of high taxes and rationing for a long time to come, then we should be prepared to advocate the continuance of rationing and the maintenance of taxes. This policy of reconstruction should begin now in time of war by sending to all the starving people of Europe food which could be distributed to those in need as the food is being distributed in Greece now.

4. American nationalism can be changed also by a course of demilitarization which should be given to every American soldier and to every soldier of every other nation in the world between the end of the war and demobilization. This demilitarization course should tell the truth about the loss of life, direct and indirect, caused by this war. The boys who dropped the block busters should be allowed to learn what happens when a block buster explodes. They should be shown how Germans have been "indoctrinated" and how our own minds have been moulded for mechanized slaughter by the manipulation of the concepts of nationalism. An analysis of the economic cost of the war should show them how little remains of our natural resources after the wastage of war. They ought to know about the profiteering on munitions. Their demilitarization should include also, on the positive side, a course in loyalty to the world community, and an understanding of the positive contribution of the cultures of the people who have been their enemies. The duty of Americans to the world community should be made clear and the part that each ex-soldier can play, not in spreading nationalism, but in providing the peace for a world society.

American nationalism is already in process of change. On the one hand, it is being changed by every Civilian Public Service work camp; by every ounce of food that goes abroad to feed the hungry; by every strip of clothing that is given in love; by every brick that is piled on every other brick in rebuilding houses by hands of brotherhood. It is being changed by the

development of the ecumenical world fellowship of Christians, by international projects of flood and famine relief, and by many other things. But it is also changing in another direction. It is changing toward heartless, air-borne imperialism; by the politics of power; by dreams of transient glory and fading empire.

American nationalism must change. Shall it change into the imperialism of "the American century" or into the shared abundance of the "century of the common man?" Shall this change, which is in process, be voluntary, moving by planned steps from nationalism into the world community in fulfilment of the promises that have been made, the dangerous promises of the four freedoms, of freedom from want and fear, freedom of speech and religion, everywhere in the world? Shall it come voluntarily because we see it coming and cooperate in building it? That is the only way it can ever come. Bloody revolution from below will not bring it and cannot in our kind of world.

Nationalism has done its best when it gives the little Japanese shop-keeper a chance to betray his neighbors and become an officer in his nation's army. It has done its best when it gives the former missionary the chance to break down a prisoner by the misuse of knowledge given him for a holy purpose. But nationalism's best isn't enough to offer the sons of God. The Christian faith has something more to offer than that. It offers salvation for man and for man's world society. This is what great missionaries like Gilbert Bowles of Japan, Arnold Vaught of China, Albert Schweitzer of Africa preach in deed as well as in word. They are the true prophets of the Kingdom of God.

The imminence of this kingdom makes our times revolutionary. They are revolutionary because any society which attempts to build on the foundations of nationalism is bound to be unstable and temporary. "Other foundation can no man lay than that which is laid in Christ Jesus." The Christian missionary movement therefore pits the universal and timeless standards of the kingdom against the tribal and momentary pretensions of nationalism. The stars in their courses fight against this modern paganism. It is doomed. In its place will come a new faith—a patriotism of humanity—based on the conviction that "one is our Father, even God, and all we are brethren" and using only those peaceful and healing methods which are consistent with the blessed ministry of reconciliation. Thanks be to God, Who has given us the privilege of witnessing to what is surely coming and is already here.

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